



VE3OJ GOES TO THE DOGS

One Night on the Trail

Jan 28, 2008 is the date that will set the scene as my son and I set out to join the BWARC amateur radio group and BARC amateur coalition at Trail Centre for the John Beargrease Dog Sled Marathon in northern Minnesota.

I was asked by Jayne, N0UYQ, to join this group of fellow radio enthusiasts to help with radio communications at Trail Centre, about 30 miles north of Grand Marais up the Gunflint Trail. This is the last checkpoint on the John Beargrease Dog Sled Marathon at the turnaround point where dog teams start the return trip to the finish line in Duluth Minnesota.



While driving to Grand Marais on Hwy #61, rain had started to fall. Yes, rain in Jan and on a highway that runs along side the mighty Superior. As the rain hit the highway, it started to freeze, making the drive a little bit of a challenge. This was nowhere near the treacherous condition that I encountered on the Gunflint Trail. With the truck locked in 4-wheel drive and at 20mph, we slowly navigated into the backwoods on dark icy roads. We arrived at Trail Centre to find just as many furry people as dogs. The Carnival excitement in the air

proved that we had reached the midway point of the toughest sled race in the lower United States.

We got parked and checked in with the radio group and tell them of our adventure coming up the trail. This sparks an immediate barrage of questions from a lot of people in the room. Everyone wants to know how the road is, and if we saw any support trucks or anyone in the ditch. I tried to answer their questions as best as possible and then found out what all the concern was about. With all the bad weather, many of the arriving dog teams were without their support team, food and shelter for the dogs and dry clothes and a place to get some much need sleep. I had walked into a very serious situation that had this place just buzzing.

Jayne is in charge of the Trail Centre communications and is showing that many years of experience with the Beargrease can prove to be a valuable asset when these kind of situations arise. Once inside, I track her down and find her and the rest of the crew from the BWARC working the radios to see what could be done and looking after the arrivals. Times are taken and information is passed and vets are dispatched to check on the dogs. First responders are standing by to help mushers with various medical problems that have happened on the trail. Broken hands, cut and scrapes are some of the problems. People are checking the leader board to see how the teams are doing, where they are, or what kind of help is needed when the teams get here. A smile and hello are passed but no time for idle chat, dog sled fever is on everyone's mind. This fever was easy to catch.

I get a crash course on what and what not to do and then jump into the fire. Time tracking, update the race board, and handling messages are a few of the official jobs but there is much more going on in the background. Race officials want to get messages out to the vets and other check points, and are constantly checking rules and making decisions that will see this

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LARC SENATE

Keith Fiske VE3JQ
 Pat Doherty VE3PD
 Dave Kimpton VE3AVS
 Laurie Bridgett VE3BCD
 Terry Stewardson VA3LU
 Ed Baumann VE3SNW

ABOUT US

The :Lakehead Amateur Radio Club (LARC) is an incorporated not for profit group of amateur radio operators in the Thunder Bay area that meet for self education, community service and fellowship. Our meetings are the second Thursday of the month at room 191 McIntyre Building, Confederation College, 7:30 PM. Our postal address is 1100C Memorial Ave. Suite 184, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 4A3. This newsletter is published monthly except for July and August by Ed Baumann VE3SNW and questions and submissions may be emailed to ve3snw@shaw.ca

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Lakehead Amateur Radio Club**Treasurer's Report**

Balance on Hand - Jan. 5/08 \$5,801.98

Income

Memberships \$35.00
 Annual Dinner \$75.00
 Bank Interest \$0.05

Total Income \$110.05

Expenses

Thunder Bay Telephone \$48.03
 Bank Service Charges \$1.50

Total Expenses \$49.53

Balance on Hand - Feb. 5/08 \$5,862.50

Joe Coghlan - VE3TBX Treasurer

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ARES District Emergency Coordinator
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Assistant
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Public Service Events
 VE3MXJ Brad 767-0628
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Amateur Radio Accredited Examiner
 VE3FAL Fred Lesnick 577-0789
flesnick@tbaytel.net

LARC OPEN ACCESS REPEATERS

VE3YQT(Mount Baldy)147.060 (-600) Phone Patch

VE3TBR (St. Joseph's) 145.490 (-600) (100.0 Hz)
 442.075 (+5 MHz)
 144.390 APRS

VE3BGA (Hillcrest H.S.) 145.450 (-600) (IRLP Node VA3LU 123.0 Hz)
 442.825 (+5 MHz) (100.0 Hz)

VE3UPP Upsala 145.470 (-600)

race to its end without any tragedies. Conditions are poor, to say the least, and these people are like one big family that needs to worry about the rest of the family out there in the bush somewhere. After 1 A.M., most of the teams are in, although a few are on the trail still. This is crunch time for the handlers. They have people looking and listening over our shoulders to every crackle from the radios, muttering under their breath, "Has the team passed the checkpoint or has anyone heard from the sweeper checking the trail?" Call after call is put out to get information. Then off in the darkness, a white light appears and as the light gets closer, red marker lights on the dogs confirm the arrival of the last team on the trail. The handlers, that have been battling fatigue and time, jump to their feet and sprint out the door to meet their extended family.

All is quiet for a while. The other volunteers in the group come inside from the staging area and tell tales of triumph and defeat. Mushers with bumps and cuts, tired dogs and weather problems are a common theme. Others in the group sneak away for a quick nap or break. Tranquil moments last only a brief time as barking dogs means that someone is getting ready to pull out. The one thing you learn from the dogs is that no matter how hard you try to contain their enthusiasm, the barking and squealing is a dead giveaway that someone has said it's time to run. First one team, then another and another head out in the frozen darkness. The radio comes to life. Bib numbers and related information is sent out to the next checkpoint. The "Grease" is on again.

The Trail Centre building springs back to life and the zombies of an hour ago look surprisingly alive. Not missing a beat, vets, first responders, volunteers and officials pick right back up and head out to check people and dogs alike and send them back from the halfway point in the race. Team after team leave, but some will not. First, one scratch then another; their reasons vary. Some for the sake of the dogs, some for the musher, all well thought out, intelligent decisions that could make or break a successful bid for a win. Some are heart broken and others just shrug their shoulders and say, "well, maybe next time". It is what drives these people to do what they do again and again.

27 teams started the marathon. 12 teams make it back to the finish line in Duluth. If you don't think this race is tough, just ask any of the teams. 400 miles of rugged terrain and broken souls is not for the weak of heart. The last of the teams indicate they will not be

participating on the return portion of the race. Duties at Trail Centre start to slow and then the word is given, "Trail Centre this is net control, your station has been cleared of duty and may shut down." There is a heavy sigh and then silence. There are people on the trail that need to be relieved and a few of us head out in vehicles to tell them the party is over and thank them for their help. Others stay at Trail Centre and start the tear down of antennas and radio gear. One by one, the building empties and we go our separate ways. Goodbyes are exchanged by old and new friends with the common theme of "See ya next year!"

Pointing the nose of the truck towards home, I tune the radio into the repeater to listen as long as possible until the static overruns the audio. This sounds like the end, but it is not.

When I get home, I turn on the set and listen to see which of the teams that I sent out early Tuesday morning is still going. Amazing! That is the only word I can think of that says it all. Reality sets in and the daily routine creeps back into my day and I turn the radio off. Next day while touching base with friends to let them know that I have arrived safely at home, I turn on the radio again and the word amazing is the first thing that comes to mind again. Here are the same teams now arriving at Duluth, crossing the finish line with the people cheering in the background. The radio has proven to me that they are safe and sound. I hear a familiar call Rick, KB0BDN, the sweeper that has followed the teams by snowmobile up and down the trail. Net control welcomes him back to the finish line.

Net control now shuts down but not before thanking all the radio people, vets, volunteers and race officials for a fine job on the 25th John Beargrease Dog Sled Marathon. "I hope to get a chance to work with all of you again, net control out."

There is strange silence but I leave the radio on and listen to the static. It sounds like barking dogs....., I **HAVE** caught **DOG FEVER**.

Special thanks go out to BWARC Boundary Waters Amateur Radio Club for the invitation to join in the Beargrease and to Jeff from BARC Beargrease Amateur Radio Coalition for the greeting and hand shake when I arrived. It was a pleasure to work with all those involved.

73's de VA3OJ

Randy

Thunder Bay

QRP where less is more!

P. Moorey VE3AXL

To the average ham this statement is a contradiction. Let me try and explain this world of qrp that many others and I have discovered. I like to operate outdoors especially while camping. The challenge of operating away from the home station and making contacts gets my adrenalin flowing. When you do this with low power it adds to the thrill and the satisfaction.

After I bought a qrp radio, on occasion I made good contacts while in the field, but many more times I was frustrated.

I set up the radio at home and used the base station antenna there, and things improved considerably. I began to read about antennas and to experiment in the field. A homebrew tuner was added to the equipment list and signals improved, both on receive as well as transmit. Hey, this is getting to be lots of fun.

I have worked dx to Israel, Australia, and Africa on qrp. I often find weak stations before the pile-ups begin and that is fun. If there is a pile up I will make a couple of calls and try my luck. Many times I can make the contact, but a lot depends on timing and getting my call out there in the clear.

On one large pile up to Europe I got my call into the clear and made the contact. I sure wasn't bending the dx stations s meter but I made the contact beating out many other high-powered stations. When the dx station learned that I was running 5 watts, he came back and offered his congratulations and stated that he found it hard to believe I would even enter a pile up with 5 watts. I still think of that contact as one of my best ever. I have fun answering a stations CQ that is driving my S meter. I usually get a 5*7,. Or a 5*8 report to the other guys ten over with his kilowatt. We exchange info, and then I mention that I am running 5 watts In many cases at that point my signal seems to fade out on the other end. On checking into some ssb nets, it seems that the controller can only copy signals that are s7 to s9, and yet other stations often within 50 miles have no problem copying my signals. Since I have made it a practice to check into these nets on low power the controllers now listens for a weaker signal. If the controller really can't copy my signal someone else can and quickly acts as a relay.

On 40m when the skip is long many times I have acted as a relay to the net control for stations down east that can't work the net control.

The above examples are all ssb contacts mainly on 20m and 40m. Cw is a lot more effective and the operators have better skills. There is a comment, commonly used about good cw operators having big ears. Many have developed an uncanny ability to detect cw signals that are so far down in the noise you could easily pass them over.

A good operator has developed the skills to work the weak signals and he is the one that makes the contacts! This is one of the secrets to being successful using qrp, You have to develop your skills as an operator. Not only do you have to be able to hear the signals you have to develop the timing and rhythm of where, and when to place your call, especially in a pile up.

That 20m-dx pile up that I made, it wasn't only my equipment, it was my skill as an operator that made it a success.

The other big secret is effective equipment. A mismatched antenna, poor feed line, dirty connections all reduce the effectiveness of your station. At qrp levels you can't afford to waste any power and if your station is less than optimum you won't hear many of the signals.

Many hams will use an amplifier and feed that power into a dipole at 25 feet. You need the most effective antenna that you can afford. No, I am not talking about a beam. A dipole at 100' will out perform a beam at 35'. You must learn which antenna; which feed line is the most effective for your operation. There is lots of information out there especially on the internet. The club has an antenna analyzer and someone will be glad to show you how to use it.

A station that is thrown together won't cut it in the world of QRP, especially in this period of low sunspot activity.

The final key to success is to have the right equipment and to know how to use it effectively. Learn to use the features of your radio. Most of the new qrp radios are loaded with special features but you have to use them repeatedly until they become automatic. Once you have set up an effective station, acquired good operating skills, qrp will become second nature to you.

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QRP continued

You will begin to look for a bigger challenge and go to even lower power levels.

I mentioned earlier that I enjoy playing radio while out camping. These new radios range in size from fitting into a jacket pocket, to about double the size of the 9v battery that powers one. Features all fall into a range between a good basic cw rig, and a full-blown multi band multi mode rig. With this range of options you can almost operate anywhere that you wish.

Remember that sometimes the dragon wins and you lose, especially with qrp. You have to know which battles to fight and the skills to be effective. I can guarantee that those battles you win will be many and very rewarding. This is the world of qrp.



Tom Caldwell

More Pictures from the John Beargrease Sleddog RaceThe operating position (*above*)Ham ops taking a break (*below*)

Isaac Riddle, KC0YBN

More Race pictures available at:

<http://www.pbase.com/summerfields/image/92307703>

This month's Web Links...

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=L5E2ntIxAsc>

<http://www.arrl.org/?artid=7958>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKd5hupXJVo>

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3wrzo_fabrication-dune-lampe-triode_tech

<http://lwa.nrl.navy.mil/>

http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/en/about_us/history_artifacts/artifacts/surveillance/art_ser_008.asp

<http://users.ece.utexas.edu/~rheath/research/mimo/antenna/>

Thanks to John VE3EMI, Bob VE3AY, Dave VE3AVS

The Prez Sez

Good Evening from the Prez on a very cold evening. As I write this on Sunday evening the temp outside is -30 C with the wind chill. What a grand reason to stay inside and play radio.

I hope you got my email of Sunday plan to attend the Annual Dinner Meeting this Saturday at 6 PM at the Slovak. The dinner speakers are Dave Ratz and Janet Roy. They will talk about how they identified the remains of the solders that were found several years ago.

I just finished checking in on the IRLP ARES net on the local repeater VE3BGA. This net runs every Wednesday and Sunday at 8PM. It connects hams all across the province via the internet. If you have not checked in why not give it a whirl. We may give a short in service demo in the next few months on how you can also check in.

And speaking of nets don't forget the Tuesday evening ARES net on YQT. If you have not checked in lately why not try on February 12th or 19th.

And of course don't forget the Northwest Ontario Phone Net. Its still the magic of radio so don't forget HF.

A bunch of us participated in the QRP Clubs Freeze Your Buns Off last weekend. The temps were ok but the propagation gods were not kind. It's the usual response wait till next year!

Hope to see you on Saturday at the Slovak.

Bill VE3XT

**DON'T FORGET!!!
LARC ANNUAL DINNER
AT THE SLOVAK LEGION.
SPECIAL GUEST
SPEAKERS FROM THE
DNA LAB.**

**SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 16TH
FUN STARTS AT 6 PM.
contact**

**Bob Hansen VE3RVA
767-6924**

February 2008

Sun IRLP Net	Mon	Tue ares net	Wed IRLP Net	Thu coffee at Boston secret decoder ring req'd	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13 NO meeting this week	14	15	16 LARC ANNUAL DINNER at the SLOVAK
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	